



Olmsted 200

Bicentennial Notes about Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township –
First Farmed in 1814 and Settled in 1815

Issue 43

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Contents

Atkinsons Explore Family and Olmsted History	1
Peltz & Simmerer Bottle Turns Up in Georgia	8
Holiday Decorations Spruce Up Olmsted's Historical Sites	9
Still to Come	12

Atkinsons Explore Family and Olmsted History

One nice aspect of the history of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township is that so many clues to what happened in the past are in plain sight. You just need to know where to look and how to interpret them. A longtime Olmsted family did that during a reunion this fall.



Joseph Gibson carved his name in rock along the east bank of Rocky River near where he rebuilt the crescent-shaped dam for Damp's Mill in 1883. Photo courtesy of Tom Atkinson.

One example of the remaining clues to history is a name carved into rock on the east bank of Rocky River near downtown Olmsted Falls: "J. Gibson." According to Tom Atkinson, his great-grandfather, Joseph Gibson, left that carving. He was a stone mason, farmer and contractor. The reason he carved his name at that location is that he was responsible for building a crescent-shaped dam there in 1883 to serve Damp's Mill.

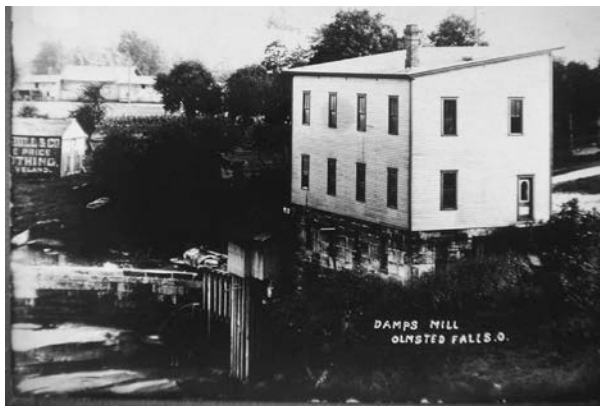
Maps of Olmsted Falls from as early as 1845 showed a mill at that site, as Bruce Banks wrote in "Dam's Mill Was an Olmsted Falls Landmark" in Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013. By 1870, Col. H.N. Whitbeck owned the mill there, as well as a quarry about where Drug

Mart now stands. By the mid-1870s, Ed Damp took over the mill and operated it until he sold it in 1906. But in 1883, a big flood damaged the foundation of the mill and the dam that held back water for it, so Damp had to have them rebuilt.

Gibson built a 13-foot-high dam out of sandstone. It curved across Rocky River for 175 feet. The dam was so high that it backed up water enough to form a lake that extended all the way to the West View area, which is now the southern part of Olmsted Falls. People used it for boating and swimming. It was deep enough that swimmers could dive into it from the bridge along what now is called Bagley Road. The dam lasted 30 years until another huge flood in March 1913 destroyed it. It was not rebuilt, but stones from it still stand along the banks of the river, and the base stones still can be seen curving across the river when the water level is especially low.

Despite Gibson's work to get Damp's Mill back into operation after the 1883 flood, he has been largely

ignored by history books. Neither Bernice Offenbergs's 1964 book, *Over the Years in Olmsted*, nor Walter Holzworth's 1966 book, *Township 6 Range 15 – Historical Story Olmsted Township, Villages of Olmsted Falls, North Olmsted, West View*, made any



This photo shows Joseph Gibson's dam next to Damp's Mill.



This photo, which was taken on August 18, 2006, when Rocky River's water level was low, shows the remaining stones from the base of Damp's Mill dam that was built in 1883 and lasted 30 years until the March 1913 flood destroyed it. Notice how it curves across the river. It once stood 13 feet high.

mention of Gibson. However, he did get a brief mention in the 2010 book, *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, on page 89.

Nevertheless, he is fondly remembered by the Atkinson family. Joseph Gibson's daughter, Josephine, married Arthur Atkinson on November 25, 1891, in Olmsted Falls. That is how the Gibson and Atkinson families came together. Thus, Joseph Gibson's work was one of the subjects considered when members of the Atkinson family met for

their reunion this past September.



Joseph Gibson, left, was born in Peterhead, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, on November 15, 1836. He died on January 24, 1914. Margaret McGill, who became the wife of Joseph Gibson, was born in Crosshill, Ayrshire, Scotland, on November 25, 1843. She died on November 24, 1912. Photos courtesy of Tom Atkinson.

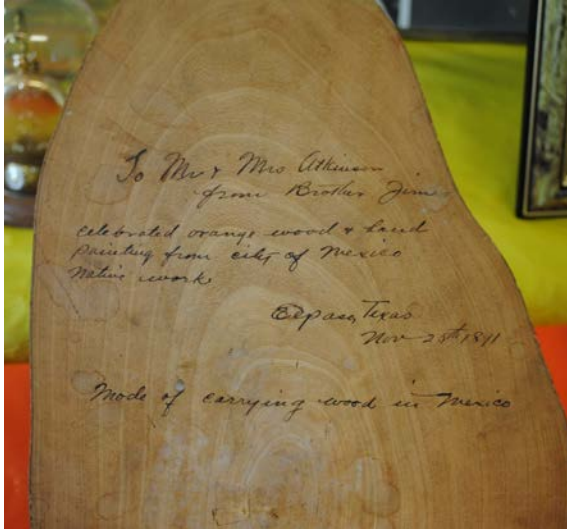


The sons and daughters of Joseph and Margaret Gibson were photographed in 1930. From left, they are: Jean Clark-Kennedy, Alex Gibson, Fan Hewitt, Jim Gibson, Isabella Stokes, Chester Gibson and Josephine Atkinson. Another daughter, Hughetta Ayres, is not in the picture. Photo courtesy of Tom Atkinson.



Arthur Atkinson married Josephine Gibson on November 25, 1891. Thus, they brought together the two families. See the next page for a wedding gift they received from her brother, Jim Gibson. Photos courtesy of Tom





Two painted wooden plaques dated November 25, 1891, were a wedding gift to Arthur and Josephine Atkinson from Josie's brother Jim Gibson living in El Paso, Texas. The one shown to the left says: "To Mr. & Mrs. Atkinson from Brother Jim, celebrated orange wood & hand painting from the city of Mexico. Native work."

El Paso, Texas
Nov. 25th 1891

Mode of carrying wood in Mexico"



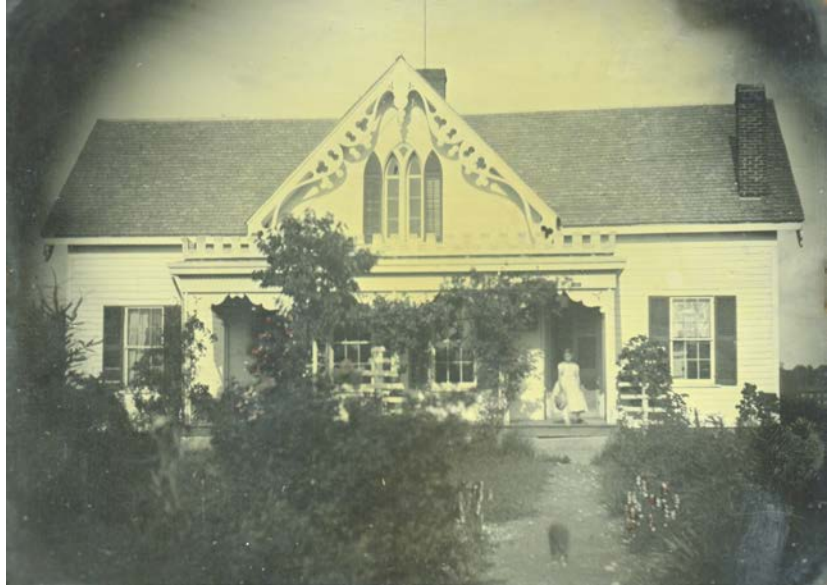
One table at the Atkinson family reunion featured a display of wills, deeds, photographs and family items from the Fitch/Atkinson homestead. In the center is the wooden plaque shown above and another that went with it. Photos courtesy of Tom Atkinson.

The Atkinson family also merged with the Fitch family in the 1800s, so another focus for the Atkinsons' reunion this fall was Helen Fitch, the adopted daughter of Elisha and MaryAnn Fitch. Helen married James Atkinson of Ridgeville in 1864. In fact, Tom Atkinson said the focus was on a photograph of Helen taken in 1856 when she was about 16 years old. The photograph shows her on the front porch of the house that was the Fitch-Atkinson homestead at 7555 Columbia Road for several decades. The house was newly built when the photograph was taken.



Helen Atkinson was about 16 years old when this photo captured her on the porch of the family home in 1856. It is a portion of the photo shown on the next page.

To the right is the full 1856 photo of the Fitch house showing Helen on the porch. Because of her marriage to James Atkinson, it later became the Atkinson homestead for several decades. New owners extensively rebuilt the house, located at 7555 Columbia Road, in the 1980s. This photo is courtesy of Tom Atkinson.



The Atkinsons' reunion featured a display table with wills, deeds, photographs and other family items. Family members toured three cemeteries to visit ancestors' graves: Fields Corner Cemetery in North Ridgeville, Butternut Ridge Cemetery in North Olmsted and Chestnut Grove (Turkeyfoot) Cemetery in Olmsted Falls. Bruce Banks, co-author of *The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township*, spoke to reunion attendees and gave them a tour of historical sites in Olmsted Falls.



Old Chestnut Grove Cemetery, also known as Turkeyfoot, in Olmsted Falls includes the graves of Joseph and Margaret Gibson, shown on the left, and their daughter, Josephine, and her husband, Arthur Atkinson, shown on the right. The Gibsons were both from Scotland, but they married on October 23, 1862, in Grimsby Township, Wentworth, Ontario, Canada. Both of them died in Olmsted Falls: Margaret in 1912 and Joseph in 1914. The Atkinsons were married on November 25, 1891, in Olmsted Falls. Arthur died in 1921. Josephine died in 1944. Photos courtesy of Tom Atkinson.



Many of the earliest settlers of Olmsted Township were buried at Butternut Ridge Cemetery, which now is in North Olmsted. Among those with graves there are Elisha and Mary Ann Fitch. Their adopted daughter, Helen, is on their porch in the photo shown on pages 4 and 5. Photo courtesy of Tom Atkinson.



Some of the Atkinsons were buried in Fields Corner Cemetery in Ridgeville Township. Among them were James and Helen Atkinson, on the left, and James's parents, Richard and Martha Atkinson, on the right. Richard was born on February 2, 1796, and died on May 10, 1881. Martha was born on September 20, 1800, and died on June 22, 1890. They married on November 28, 1820. James was born on September 7, 1836 (although the headstone says 1837), and died on January 12, 1879. Helen was born on November 29, 1839, and died on July 21, 1912. They married on December 24, 1862, in Olmsted Falls. Ten years after his death, she married Joseph Brice on August 31, 1889. However, her death certificate says she was buried next to her first husband, James. Photos courtesy of Tom Atkinson.

The reunion in September was just the latest of many held over several decades by the Fitch and Atkinson families. Attendees at the latest reunion shared photos of previous meetings and took some photos of their own.

August 1970 was the last time all nine of the sons and daughters of Arthur and Josephine Atkinson gathered together. Shown in this photo taken at Chester Atkinson's home on Nobottom Road are (left to right): Una Bauer, Helen Rauscher, Margaret Parker, Ira Atkinson, Grace Shane-Wadstrom, Zella Foley, Chester Atkinson, Wallace Atkinson and Bruce Atkinson.



About 70 relatives and guests attended the September 2016 reunion. Ten of the 20 grandchildren of Arthur and Josephine Atkinson are still living, and eight of them attended the reunion in Olmsted Falls. Seven are shown here (left to right): Tom Atkinson, Helen Dipert, Ginia Lorenz, Chester Atkinson, Tim Atkinson, Dick Foley and Josephine Atkinson (Jim Atkinson not in picture).

Also at the reunion were several members of the Millennial generation who are second and third cousins. All photos on this page are courtesy of Tom Atkinson.



*Bruce Banks, co-author of **The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township**, led attendees of the Atkinson family reunion on a historical tour of Olmsted Falls. In this photo, he is shown at the Mill Street doorway of the Grand Pacific Hotel. Photo courtesy of Tom Atkinson.*



For more on the Atkinson-Fitch family in Olmsted Falls, see “Busing Evolved in the 20th Century” in Issue 5 of *Olmsted 200* from October 2013 and “Fitch Family Was Big When Olmsted Was Young” in Issue 15 of *Olmsted 200* from August 2014.

Peltz & Simmerer Bottle Turns Up in Georgia

As *Olmsted 200* chronicled in a series of articles earlier this year, Joseph Peltz and Philip Simmerer, who were brothers-in-law, operated a combination drugstore and hardware for about two decades beginning in 1893 in the building now known as the Grand Pacific Hotel. Artifacts from their partnership keep turning up among their descendants.

Sue Simmerer found such an item recently. She is the widow of Philip E. Simmerer, who was the grandson of the elder Philip Simmerer. Recently, she was visiting her son in Atlanta and found what might be the only bottle with the Peltz & Simmerer label that the family still has.



More than a century ago, Olmsted residents received medicine in bottles like this one from Peltz & Simmerer. Photo courtesy of Sue Simmerer.

Photos contributed by Sue Simmerer of other pharmacy bottles, as well as a clock and buggy seat from the Simmerer family, appeared in Issue 38 of *Olmsted 200* from July 2016,

Holiday Decorations Spruce Up Olmsted Historical Sites



This sign and bench greet visitors at the entrance of the parking lot between Olmsted Community Church and the Moosehead restaurant.

The holiday season is an interesting time to visit Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township because of the seasonal activities and decorations. Among those activities is the annual Christmas Open House at Grand Pacific Junction. This year, it is scheduled for all day on Saturday, December 3. Included are wagon rides, Christmas carolers and stories by Santa Claus in the caboose. (See www.gpjmerchants.com for more info.)



A choir sings carols as a horse-drawn wagon stands by to give rides at the 2015 Christmas Open House at Grand Pacific Junction.

Many Grand Pacific Junction shops have holiday specials and refreshments during the open house.

Nearby on Saturday, December 3, and Sunday, December 4, the Cuyahoga Valley and West Shore Model Railroad Club will have its Christmas Open House from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day. The club will show off its HO, O and N scale model railroads that run throughout the Olmsted Falls depot, which was built in 1876 by the Lakeshore and Michigan Southern Railroad. Next to the depot is a former Pennsylvania Railroad caboose. The depot is located along Garfield Street near Brookside Drive.

For more information about the history of the depot, see Issue 2 of *Olmsted 200* from July 2013. (Also see the club's website at: www.cvwsr.org.)



Children listen to tales from Santa Claus in the Grand Pacific Junction caboose.



Manikins dressed as carolers greet visitors from the windows of the Grand Pacific Hotel during the holiday season in Olmsted Falls.

Friends of Bill and Marty Richner get to see their historic house at the corner of Columbia Road and Nobottom Road decorated for the holiday season. One section of the big house dates back to the small house built by John and Maria Adams in 1820. Stories on how the Richners have been restoring and renovating the house can be found in Issue 4 of *Olmsted 200* from September 2015 and Issue 29 from October 2015.



The living room of the Richners' home, left, is the section that dates back to 1820. This time of year, the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. Below left are Marty and Bill Richner from a 2015 holiday party. Below right is another fireplace decorated for the Christmas season.



Still to Come

The next issue of *Olmsted 200* will include more stories about Olmsted's history. In 2017, *Olmsted 200* will have stories about the history of the Olmsted Community Church, which will celebrate a centennial next year, and about an Olmsted Township house that was built in the mid-1800s and has been lovingly restored.

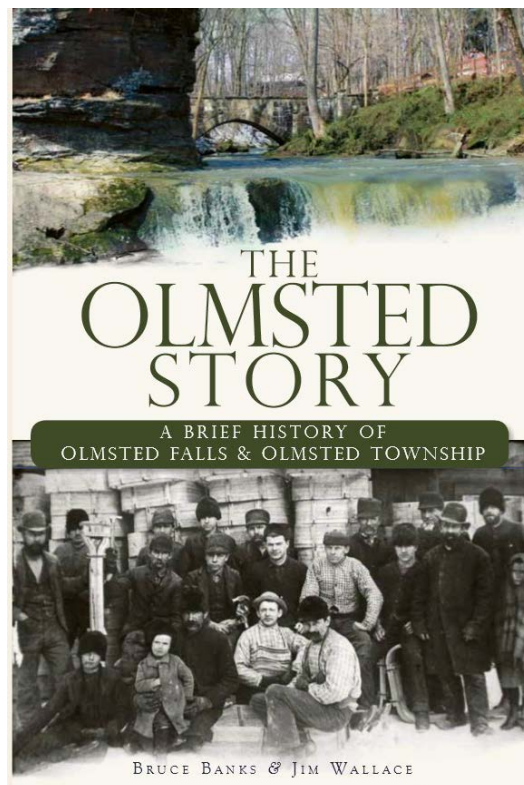
If you know of other people who would like to receive *Olmsted 200* by email, please feel free to forward it to them. They can get on the distribution list by sending a request to: wallacestar@hotmail.com. *Olmsted 200* has readers in several states beyond Ohio, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine, as well as overseas in the Netherlands, Germany and Japan.

Your questions and comments about *Olmsted 200* are welcome. Perhaps there is something about Olmsted's history that you would like to have pulled out of *Olmsted 200*'s extensive archives. Or perhaps you have information or photos about the community's history that you would like to share.

If you have missed any of the past issues of *Olmsted 200* or want to share them with someone else, all of them can be found on Olmsted Township's website. Go to <http://www.egovlink.com/olmsted/docs/menu/home.asp> and click on "Olmsted 200."

Except where otherwise noted, all articles in *Olmsted 200* are written by Jim Wallace. Thanks go to Mary Louise King for help in proofreading and editing many issues. Written contributions and photos, as well as comments and questions about items in this newsletter, will be considered for publication. Send any correspondence by email to: wallacestar@hotmail.com.

Olmsted 200 is written, researched and edited by Jim Wallace, who is solely responsible for its content. He is co-author (with Bruce Banks) of ***The Olmsted Story: A Brief History of Olmsted Falls and Olmsted Township***, published in 2010 by The History Press of Charleston, S.C. *The Olmsted Story* is available at the Berea Historical Society's Mahler Museum & History Center and through online booksellers.



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